

these aren't the people i can write about.  
they have their chroniclers, the guys on the bestseller  
lists.  
america, the indians at least demanded beads.

## THE POETRY CONTEST

A few years ago a friend and former student of mine  
who is now chairman of a local high school English  
department  
was asked by a citizen's group to find a judge for  
their poetry contest.

He got in touch with me.

Most of the poems were predictable expressions  
of first love, patriotic ardor, and ecological concern.

But one young math student  
had gained access to the school-district computer.  
He fed it whatever Alpo those things devour  
and turned it loose.

It came up with a lot of great lines.  
The one that's always stuck with me  
was, "The bird flies backwards into the barn."

Within that congestion of circuitry  
lurked the soul of a Rimbaud.

Programmed, you say?

It was much less programmed  
than the minds of the high school students.

If I could have wooed that computer  
I would have married it.  
It would have been my Sylvia Plath.  
Our life together would of course have ended tragically.  
Since it would easily have out-imaged me,  
I would have been forced to drive it to suicide.

At any rate, I awarded he/she/it First Prize.

I haven't been asked to judge a contest since then.